

Grower 'spills the beans' about foreign competition

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — By the time Ron Oneto was 4 years old he was sure he wanted to stay on the farm.

"I was born and raised in Stockton," he said. "My

grandparents lived in the orchard. When I'd hear my uncle coming into their yard with a tractor, I would go running towards him. He'd stop, I'd climb on, and he'd let me finish driving the tractor into the yard."

Today, Oneto and his broth-

er farm 2,200 acres of dry beans, cherries, walnuts, wine grapes, processing and fresh market tomatoes, silage and grain corn and wheat.

He is also chairman of the California Dry Bean Advisory Board.

"Our varieties we grow

are Green Baby Lima, Yellow beans, White, Light, and Dark Kidneys," he said. "Our total acres remains around 500. Each year there are different acres of each, depending on field sizes."

Oneto said about 44,000 acres are planted to beans each year in California.

According to Nathan Sano, manager of the California Bean Advisory Board, lygus and thrips are the two worst pests for beans in California.

"Thrips are a small insect that usually attacks young plants, stunting their growth," he said. "Lygus are more known for their feeding on the bean seed preventing growth or puncture damage to the seed, making the bean unmarketable."

In spite of the pests, beans are a relatively easy crop to grow, as long as it's dry during harvest time. Wet beans are hard to dry, and they can be damaged if are harvested while moist.

Oneto said the biggest challenge facing California bean growers is the Japanese mar-



Ron Oneto

"They (Japan) account for about 70 percent of the Baby Lima market," he said. "They have been sourcing Baby Limas from Myanmar at a cheaper price point. The California industry is working quite hard at trying to keep market share in Japan."

There is also a lot of competition from foreign imports, he said.

Beans can be stored for a long time, too, which allows brokers and handlers to choose where they buy beans.

Beyond Japan, trade in general remains a challenge, he said.

"Trade is a big topic currently, especially since the November election," Oneto said. "President Trump has said he wants to relook at all trade agreements and I agree. When you hear about how these agreements are put together, U.S. agriculture gets the short end."



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